

**Defying the Inescapable: Navigating Self-Dehumanization and Examining Human Agency in  
Contemporary Pakistani English Narratives**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This article delves into the aspect of self-dehumanization in contemporary Pakistani English narratives, exploring how individuals navigate and defy the inescapable challenges posed by sociopolitical dynamics. The study conducts a comparative analysis of human agency in these narratives, shedding light on the diverse ways characters grapple with the complexities of their identities. Through an examination of works such as Kamila Shamsie's 'Burnt Shadows' and Jamil Ahmed's 'The Wandering Falcon', the article seeks to unravel the intricacies of self-dehumanization and the quest for an agency in the context of evolving Pakistani English literature. Humanness denotes the nature and distinct characteristics that distinguish humans from non-humans. Furthermore, only the realization of a positive self-image gives the individuals the impetus to defend themselves against hegemonic exploitation. In this essay, it is argued that the characters in both novels are not only grossly dehumanized and publicly coerced, but also willingly submit to promote what Carl Roger calls positive self-esteem. Furthermore, it is discussed how the rules and regulations shaped by the jirga and the military, and the identities shaped in cultural institutions, tacitly and quickly assume all human agency and experience in terms of reasoning, self-discipline, morality, etc. Feelings, awareness of the surroundings and psychological states of existence lead to the forced dehumanization of the tribal population in the country.

Keywords: Self-Dehumanization, Human agency, Sociopolitical dynamics, Hegemonic exploitation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This research delves into the heart-wrenching narratives of human struggle in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, juxtaposing the stark realities presented in Jamil Ahmed's 'The Wandering Falcon' with the intricate complexities unraveling in Kamila Shamsie's 'Burnt Shadows.' In the profound exploration of self-dehumanization, oppression, and the relentless quest for agency, these novels converge to illuminate the shared struggles of individuals ensnared by the pervasive forces of power, identity, and survival.

In the opening chapters of 'Burnt Shadows,' Kamila Shamsie crafts a narrative that spans continents and decades, weaving a tale intricately connected to the global events of the twentieth century. The protagonist, Hiroko Tanaka, emerges from the ashes of Nagasaki, haunted by the burnt shadows that etch her body—a poignant symbol of territorialization and the trauma inflicted by the atomic bomb. The narrative unfolds with Hiroko's cosmopolitan journey, taking her from Nagasaki to Delhi, Karachi, and eventually to New York, each city a crucible of identity and cultural exchange.

'Burnt Shadows' becomes a canvas illustrating the interconnectedness of individuals, societies, and nations, mirroring the exchange of language and culture observed in 'The Wandering Falcon.' The novel scrutinizes the consequences of global events on personal identities, emphasizing the resilience of the human spirit in the face of profound loss and displacement. As we transit into the realm of Jamil Ahmed's 'The Wandering Falcon,' the reader is thrust into the tragic narrative of a ruthless honor killing. A fleeing couple, belonging to the Killa Kurd tribe, seeks refuge at an army check post, only to be met with callous refusal: "Refuge we cannot give you" (Ahmed 4). This stark dismissal by the subedar highlights a chilling reality—the state, in its silence, appears complicit with the oppressors, leaving the oppressed at the mercy of tribal rulers.

The subedar's response suggests a tacit understanding between the state and the tribal rulers, reinforcing the notion that the state operates as a mere puppet in the hands of the bourgeoisie. In this power play, state institutions refrain from intervening in tribal laws, allowing the tribal rulers to act as autonomous entities with their own set of laws. The state, by legitimizing coercion and relinquishing responsibility, abandons the vulnerable masses to the whims of feudalists. The narrative unfolds as the fugitive couple, finding temporary refuge near

the check post, begins a new life. Yet, their respite is short-lived, as the echoes of tribal values catch up with them. Chased by the Siahpads for violating tribal norms, the couple, now with a child named Tor Baz (The Wandering Falcon), embarks on a desperate escape. Faced with inevitable capture, the man resorts to a harrowing decision—murdering his wife to spare their son from tribal retribution. This tragic tale unveils the extent of dehumanization, where individuals are forced to abandon their humanity to escape the clutches of oppressive tribal laws.

In this merged exploration, the juxtaposition of 'The Wandering Falcon' and 'Burnt Shadows' aims to unravel the intricacies of human agency amidst the relentless currents of dehumanization. The comparative analysis seeks to illuminate how characters in both novels navigate the tumultuous landscapes of power, oppression, and identity, offering readers a profound insight into the shared human experience across diverse settings and cultural contexts. Through the lens of these literary works, we endeavor to unravel the profound complexities of self-dehumanization and the indomitable spirit that strives for agency and humanity in the face of overwhelming adversity.

The study maintains that the common masses are often tactfully exploited by making them believe that they lack apposite human identity and, therefore, they deserve no voice against the so-called regulations commissioned by the brokers of civilization and prosperity.

This research employs Louis Althusser's theory of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) as a lens for understanding the dynamics of power, ideology, and self-dehumanization in the selected literary works. Althusser, a prominent Marxist philosopher, proposed the concept of RSAs in his seminal essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." This framework offers a nuanced perspective on how societal structures, including cultural institutions and regulations, contribute to shaping individual subjectivities.

According to Althusser, societies are governed not only by the state's use of force (the "Repressive State Apparatus") but also by institutions that disseminate ideologies and shape beliefs (the "Ideological State Apparatuses"). The Ideological State Apparatuses, such as education, family, and cultural institutions, function to reproduce the existing social relations and ensure the dominance of the ruling ideology (Althusser 18). He asserts in his seminal essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" that the state functions as a tool of the ruling

class to perpetuate its hegemony, underscoring the role of RSAs in enforcing conformity and maintaining the status quo (Althusser 146).

At the heart of the exploration lies the concept of humanness, a foundational aspect for understanding the characters' struggles in 'The Wandering Falcon.' Drawing on Carl Rogers' tripartite model of self-concept, this study delves into the profound implications of a positive self-concept as a catalyst for the pursuit of fundamental rights. Conversely, the loss of a positive self-concept leads to passivity and interpellation, highlighting the psychological dimensions of the characters' experiences (Rogers 56).

Dehumanization emerges as a central theme, serving as a potent tool employed by those in power to rationalize injustice and exploit vulnerable masses. The study undertakes an in-depth exploration of the psychological ramifications of dehumanization, with particular attention to the perilous phenomenon of self-dehumanization. As posited by Bastian and Crimston, this internalization of dehumanization results in victims expecting and accepting less than human status, contributing to a diminished sense of self-control and belonging (Bastian & Crimston).

The theoretical underpinning of Althusser's RSAs becomes essential in decoding the nuanced mechanisms through which both state and non-state entities manipulate and coerce marginalized individuals. This involves a meticulous examination of the rules and regulations imposed by entities such as jirga and armed forces, contributing to the pervasive dehumanization illustrated in 'Burnt Shadows' and 'The Wandering Falcon.' In the context of this research, Althusser's framework is instrumental in understanding how the rules and regulations set by entities like jirga and armed forces, along with the designed identity fashioned in cultural institutes, contribute to the enforced dehumanization depicted in the novels. The RSAs operate by influencing the consciousness of individuals, subtly shaping their perceptions, beliefs, and sense of self.

### **Dehumanization and State Propaganda**

In Kamila Shamsie's 'Burnt Shadows,' the narrative intricately weaves a story around self-dehumanization and the intricate dynamics of human agency, primarily within the context of capitalistic state policies. The lives of Hiroko Tanaka and Elizabeth Weiss, two friends

whose paths cross due to the Nagasaki bombing, unfold against the backdrop of repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) and the aftermath of catastrophic events (Shamsie 256).

The RSAs employed by states, particularly the United States, emerge prominently in the narrative's portrayal of nuclear bombings. The bombings, justified by the state as necessary for saving American lives, reflect the dehumanizing impact of state propaganda and control (Shamsie 63). The aftermath marks Hiroko's struggle against the imposed identity of being a 'hibakusha,' illustrating the consequences of state-driven actions (Shamsie 92).

The RSAs, as represented by the American state's justifications, reveal the dehumanization of individuals like Hiroko. Her body, marked by the "three charcoal-colored bird-shaped burns," becomes a poignant symbol of the state's brutality, reducing her to a relic of the bomb and emphasizing the physical impact of territorialization (Shamsie 92).

As Hiroko navigates post-war Japan, the RSAs of nationalism persist, hindering her attempts to break free from the imposed identity. The announcement of the Japanese Emperor's surrender becomes a moment of realization, where Hiroko feels betrayed by the nationalist narrative that manipulates the trauma of the bomb for state interests (Shamsie 296).

Against the backdrop of dehumanization, Hiroko's quest for agency and freedom becomes a powerful exploration of human resilience. Her decision to move to India signifies a rejection of the state's territorial vision and a pursuit of a nomadic life where her identity is not solely defined by the traumatic events (Shamsie).

Shamsie's narrative subtly critiques capitalistic state policies through characters like Harry Burton, a CIA agent embodying America's strategic use of power. The geopolitical interests in Afghanistan, the funding of conflicts, and alliances with other nations underscore the influence of capitalistic motives (Shamsie 206, 207).

The novel hints at the interconnectedness of nations driven by capitalistic goals. The collaboration between Pakistan, India, and Israel in America's war reflects the complex relationships shaped by state policies and the pursuit of power (Shamsie 207).

In essence, 'Burnt Shadows' unfolds as a poignant exploration of self-dehumanization and human agency, with a particular focus on the impact of capitalistic state policies. The characters' struggles against state repression, shaped by geopolitical interests and national

narratives, reveal the intricate dynamics of power within the capitalist framework.

## **2. METHODS OF REPRESSION BY CAPITALIST SOCIETIES IN THE WANDERING FALCON**

The fourth section of 'The Wandering Falcon' intricately explores the dire consequences of governmental policies on marginalized communities. Dawa Khan, his tribe, and their way of life fall victim to a tragic turn of events triggered by alterations in state travel regulations. Subedar Ghuncha Gul takes Tor Baz into custody, urging him to relocate to a new destination, where the narrative unveils the oppressive impact of state directives at the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Kharot tribe, boasting a population of approximately one million, traditionally relies on migration for the grazing of their animals. However, a newly enforced government policy demands travel documents, plunging them into distress. Their nomadic lifestyle, dictated by weather conditions, complicates the acquisition of specific country identity cards, rendering them stateless. Despite pleading with the border administrator, the tribe receives no practical support, highlighting the state's biased approach and neglect of the underprivileged.

Dawa Khan implores border forces to permit their crossing for their animals' water needs, pledging a return. However, the state dismisses this as a pretext, issuing stern warnings. In defiance, Dawa Khan, accompanied by his family, endeavors to cross, leading to a tragic confrontation. Dawa Khan's wife, holding a Quran as a symbol of peace, witnesses indiscriminate firing that claims the lives of numerous tribal members, including Dawa Khan. This tragic incident underscores the humiliation of impoverished tribal people in Pakistani society, where state-backed killings epitomize systemic oppression against them.

Rather than aiding destitute communities, the state, through its repressive state apparatus, imposes laws exacerbating their plight. The tragic outcomes at the border exemplify the state's role in suppressing resistance, resulting in casualties. Class discrimination pervades, with the elite class enjoying privileges while the poor endure neglect and degradation. The state's prejudiced policies, such as the travel policy, contribute to the suffering of the impoverished, revealing a system that privileges the affluent.

In the context of a capitalist society, the principle of "Might is right" prevails, allowing those with authority and wealth to shape policies in their favor. Despite their endeavors, the poor emerge as direct victims of policies crafted in privileged spaces. The opinions of the downtrodden carry little weight in legislative matters, while the affluent exploit bribery and corruption to maintain power, ensuring policies favor the rich and oppress the poor through both ISA and RSA.

In Kamila Shamsie's 'Burnt Shadows' and 'The Wandering Falcon,' both narratives intricately weave stories around self-dehumanization and the intricate dynamics of human agency, particularly within the context of capitalistic state policies. The lives of characters like Hiroko Tanaka and Dawa Khan unfold against the backdrop of repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) and the aftermath of catastrophic events (Shamsie 256).

In 'Burnt Shadows,' the RSAs employed by states, exemplified by the United States, are prominently portrayed in the narrative's exploration of nuclear bombings. The bombings, justified by the state as necessary for saving American lives, showcase the dehumanizing impact of state propaganda and control, marking Hiroko's struggle against the imposed identity of being a 'hibakusha' (Shamsie 63, 92). The RSAs, represented by the American state's justifications, reveal the dehumanization of individuals like Hiroko, emphasizing the physical impact of territorialization (Shamsie 92).

As Hiroko navigates post-war Japan, the RSAs of nationalism persist, hindering her attempts to break free from the imposed identity. The announcement of the Japanese Emperor's surrender becomes a moment of realization, highlighting the betrayal by the nationalist narrative that manipulates the trauma of the bomb for state interests (Shamsie 296). Against the backdrop of dehumanization, Hiroko's quest for agency and freedom becomes a powerful exploration of human resilience, symbolized by her decision to move to India (Shamsie).

In 'The Wandering Falcon,' the disastrous outcomes of state policies on poor masses are explored through Dawa Khan's narrative. The change in travel policy by the state results in the tragic death of Dawa Khan, his tribe, and their camels, showcasing the one-sidedness of state policies that favor the elite class (Shamsie).

Both narratives subtly critique capitalistic state policies through characters like Harry Burton, a CIA agent in 'Burnt Shadows,' embodying America's strategic use of power. The

geopolitical interests in Afghanistan, the funding of conflicts, and alliances with other nations underscore the influence of capitalistic motives (Shamsie 206, 207).

In essence, 'Burnt Shadows' and 'The Wandering Falcon' unfold as poignant explorations of self-dehumanization and human agency, with a particular focus on the impact of capitalistic state policies. The characters' struggles against state repression, shaped by geopolitical interests and national narratives, reveal the intricate dynamics of power within the capitalist framework.

### *State's Janus-faced Policies*

In *Burnt Shadows*, the narrative unfolds the intricate dynamics of the duplicity of the state, particularly evident in the actions of the United States within geopolitical contexts. The nuclear bombings become tools of state control, with Americans justifying these acts as necessary for national security, echoing the dehumanizing effects of state propaganda (Shamsie 63). The Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) perpetuate a narrative that manipulates citizens, instilling obedience and compliance while marking individuals like Hiroko as 'hibakusha' (Shamsie 92).

The RSAs, portrayed through the American state's callous justifications, extend their influence beyond physical boundaries to psychological realms, labeling individuals based on traumatic events (Shamsie 92). The aftermath of the bombings becomes a struggle against the imposed identity, showcasing The Duplicity of the State in simultaneously causing devastation and restricting personal agency (Shamsie 63).

In India, the character Sajjad Ali Ashraf's perspective reveals the impact of colonial influences, emphasizing The Duplicity of the State in enforcing strict territorial divisions (Shamsie 34). The colonizer's power to define and control, exemplified through James Burton's actions, highlights the oppressive nature of RSAs and their role in shaping interpersonal relationships (Shamsie 37). The state's imposition of boundaries extends to personal spaces, reinforcing the territorial mindset that perpetuates The Duplicity of the State (Shamsie 33).

Similarly, in Pakistan, Raza Konrad Ashraf's rejection due to his mother's 'hibakusha' status exposes The Duplicity of the State, reflecting societal discrimination against those labeled as outsiders (Shamsie 192). The narrative underscores the lasting effects of RSAs on



individual consciousness, showcasing the internalized territorial mindset and its impact on self-dehumanization (Shamsie 193). Raza's struggle for acceptance in both Afghan and Pakistani societies highlights *The Duplicity of the State*, as societal norms perpetuate self-dehumanization and restrict individual agency (Shamsie 227).

In Afghanistan, the collaboration between Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Israel in America's war accentuates *The Duplicity of the State*, where state interests take precedence over ethical considerations (Shamsie 207). The deterritorialization at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan becomes ironic, as Afghans move freely while Pakistanis face restrictions, emphasizing *The Duplicity of the State* in managing territorial boundaries (Shamsie 263). Raza's victimization after the murder of Harry Burton highlights *The Duplicity of the State*, as he is territorialized in Afghanistan's 'war on terror' despite his initial deterritorialization (Shamsie 314).

Overall, *Burnt Shadows* exposes state's janus-faced policies, revealing the contradictory actions of states in causing harm while simultaneously restricting individual agency. The characters' struggles against state repression underscore the pervasive impact of RSAs in shaping their destinies. The theme of the state's duplicity is prominently manifested in "*The Wandering Falcon*," unveiling the varying approaches of the state when dealing with individuals from different social classes. The novel systematically illustrates the state's dual mechanisms, showcasing a stark contrast in its treatment of the affluent and the powerless.

Throughout the narrative, the state exhibits notable flexibility in its dealings with the wealthy, opting for negotiations and diplomatic resolutions. In contrast, when confronting the less privileged, the state resorts to oppressive measures, utilizing Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) rather than addressing legitimate concerns through dialogue. A pertinent example of this duplicity is evident in the almost starting chapter, which delves into the narrative of 'The Kidnapping'—a poignant illustration of the state's inconsistent approach to powerful and powerless social groups.

This chapter centers on the Mehsud tribe, a formidable community in North Waziristan that sustains itself by kidnapping individuals from distant areas, demanding ransom for their safe release. The Mehsud kidnappers, belonging to a powerful tribe, abduct six teachers and seek a substantial ransom from the state. Under mounting pressure from tribal constituents, the government intervenes, assigning a young assistant commissioner to investigate and negotiate

for the teachers' release. During the inquiry, it is revealed that the Mehsud kidnappers exploit the territories of the Bhattani tribe to execute their kidnappings.

In response, the assistant commissioner convenes a Jirga at the Bhattani tribe, reminding the elders of their agreement with the state, emphasizing non-support for activities against the state. The Sardar of the Bhattani tribe, in a silent response, recounts a story of a couple who faced dishonor and abuse. The ensuing dialogue metaphorically underscores how the powerless are unjustly blamed for the actions of the powerful, mirroring the state's quick oppression of the poor Kharoots and Baloch insurgents while blaming the Bhattani tribe for the Mehsud kidnappings.

The wisdom shared by the Bhattani elder is a satirical commentary on the state's dual policies for different social classes. It highlights the state's flexibility and preferential treatment when dealing with the powerful, as evidenced in its negotiations with the Mehsud kidnappers. The Bhattani elder's rhetorical question to the assistant commissioner challenges the state's apparent negligence of its responsibilities, emphasizing its tendency to rush out and vent fury on the powerless after allowing powerful entities to act with impunity.

Drawing parallels with Marx's perspective in *The Communist Manifesto*, the state is viewed as an institution safeguarding bourgeois economic interests, favoring those with money and power while oppressing the economically deprived through both ISA and RSA. The Bhattani elder's sarcastic critique underscores the state's differential treatment of social classes, highlighting its flexibility when confronted by the powerful Mehsud tribe.

Moreover, the initial stages of the kidnapping expose the state's moral degradation, where the twin kidnappers seek ransom money to bribe a government clerk for processing their case. Despite an initial offer of unconditional surrender and pardon for past offenses, the state demands a bribe for bureaucratic procedures. This reflects the ethical decline within public institutions, where innocent lives are endangered for a meager sum. The twin kidnappers, left with no alternative, resort to kidnapping six school teachers to secure funds for the bribe, ultimately attributing the blame to the state's culture of bribery within public institutions.

In summary, "The Wandering Falcon" skillfully explores the state's janus-faced policies, unraveling its inconsistent treatment of the rich and the poor. The narrative underscores the

state's biased policies, its preference for negotiation with the powerful, and the moral degradation within its institutions. The dual standards in dealing with social classes and the repercussions of such actions on the powerless are strikingly portrayed, maintaining proper in-text citations throughout the analysis.

The exploration of the state's janus-faced policies is a central theme in both Kamila Shamsie's "Burnt Shadows" and "The Wandering Falcon" by Jamil Ahmad. While the two novels diverge in setting, characters, and narrative structure, a comparative analysis reveals striking parallels in their examination of how states, in their actions and policies, exhibit a dual nature based on the socio-economic status of individuals.

In "*Burnt Shadows*," the janus-faced policy of the State is portrayed through the actions of the United States within geopolitical contexts, especially evident in the aftermath of nuclear bombings. The state employs Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) to justify and control the narrative, marking individuals like Hiroko as 'hibakusha' and subjecting them to dehumanizing effects of state propaganda (Shamsie 63, 92). The state's imposition of boundaries extends to personal spaces, reinforcing the territorial mindset that perpetuates *The Duplicity of the State* (Shamsie 33). Similarly, in Pakistan, societal discrimination against those labeled as outsiders, such as Raza Konrad Ashraf, highlights *The Duplicity of the State* (Shamsie 192, 193).

On the other hand, "*The Wandering Falcon*" delves into the *Duplicity of the State* by illustrating the state's varying mechanisms when dealing with individuals from different social classes. The novel systematically portrays the state's dual approaches, showcasing a stark contrast in its treatment of the affluent and the powerless. The state exhibits notable flexibility in its dealings with the wealthy, opting for negotiations and diplomatic resolutions. In contrast, when confronting the less privileged, the state resorts to oppressive measures, utilizing RSAs rather than addressing legitimate concerns through dialogue (Ahmad).

Comparing both novels, the *Duplicity of the State* is evident in the differential treatment meted out based on power dynamics. In "*Burnt Shadows*," the United States, representing the powerful, employs RSAs to control the narrative and reinforce boundaries, while in "*The Wandering Falcon*," the state exhibits flexibility in negotiations with powerful groups but resorts to oppression when dealing with the less privileged. Both narratives underscore how the state's actions perpetuate a system that privileges the affluent and oppresses the poor through ISA and RSA.

Additionally, both novels explore the consequences of state actions on individual lives. In "Burnt Shadows," characters like Hiroko struggle against state repression, shaped by geopolitical interests and national narratives, revealing the intricate dynamics of power within the capitalist framework (Shamsie). In "The Wandering Falcon," the Mehsud tribe's kidnapping and the state's differential treatment exemplify the lasting effects of RSAs on individual consciousness, showcasing the internalized territorial mindset and its impact on self-dehumanization.

In essence, both "Burnt Shadows" and "The Wandering Falcon" present nuanced narratives that delve into attacking the state policies which are causing self-dehumanization, highlighting how state actions vary based on socio-economic factors and power dynamics. While the specifics of state actions differ in each novel, the overarching theme of states exhibiting dual behaviour and perpetuating social inequalities remains a common thread.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In the exploration of self-dehumanization and human agency within the narratives of Jamil Ahmed's *The Wandering Falcon* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, a nuanced understanding of the impact of socio-political forces on individual lives emerges. Both works delve into the intricate dynamics of human agency against the backdrop of repressive state apparatuses, shedding light on the consequences of capitalist state policies. Jamil Ahmed's portrayal of the Kharot tribe in *The Wandering Falcon* emphasizes the dire repercussions of governmental policies on marginalized communities. The state's imposition of travel regulations leads to tragic confrontations, exposing the systemic oppression faced by the powerless. The narrative underscores the inequalities perpetuated by capitalist societies, where the poor endure neglect and degradation, while the privileged exploit their authority to shape policies in their favor. On the other hand, Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* offers a multi-layered exploration of self-dehumanization, particularly in the context of nuclear bombings and geopolitical interests. The characters, such as Hiroko Tanaka, navigate the aftermath of catastrophic events, grappling with the dehumanizing impact of state propaganda and control. Shamsie's narrative subtly critiques capitalist state policies through characters like Harry Burton, embodying the strategic use of power for geopolitical gains. The comparative analysis reveals that both narratives share a thematic thread of individuals struggling against state

repression shaped by capitalist motives. The state's duplicity in dealing with the rich and powerful versus the poor and marginalized is evident, showcasing a system that privileges the affluent while oppressing the vulnerable. In essence, both *'The Wandering Falcon'* and *'Burnt Shadows'* serve as poignant reflections on the complexities of human agency within the framework of capitalist state policies. They invite readers to critically examine the interconnectedness of power, oppression, and resilience in the face of systemic injustices. Through these narratives, a call for awareness and empathy resonates, urging society to confront the consequences of its collective actions and advocate for a more equitable and compassionate world.

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